

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	23 MARCH 2022
SUBJECT	ANNUAL REPORT ON GOVERNANCE
LEAD OFFICER	KATIE MILLS, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR TINA MCKENZIE-BOYLE
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To consider the Annual Report on Governance detailing Member Attendance and Allowances in 2021/22 for submission to the Fire Authority on 30 June 2022.
- 1.2 For the purpose of this report, appendices A and B (Members Allowances and Attendance) are shown from 1 June 2021 to 28 February 2022. As outlined in recommendation 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, the appendices will be updated to the end of May 2022.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **NOTE** the report; and
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** that the Fire Authority:
 - 2.2.1 **NOTE** Members' Allowances received from 1 June 2021 – 31 May 2022;
 - 2.2.2 **NOTE** the 2021/22 attendance record of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members from 1 June 2021 – 31 May 2022.

3. **REPORT**

- 3.1 This is the second year as a Fire Authority we have had to live with COVID-19 measures and adapt accordingly. From 4 May 2021, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, expired. This meant Fire Authority and Committee meetings where required to be held

in person. As a Fire Authority, we have ensured that the Government's COVID guidelines were followed and, more recently, with the easing of national restrictions, that the Service's own risk assessments and guidance has been followed to ensure the safety of Members and staff.

3.2 In July 2021, we received our Annual Internal Audit Opinion from RSM, which gave the following opinion from the 12 months ended 31 March 2021.

'The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control'.¹

3.3 I am extremely proud of this opinion, however, as Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee, I am not complacent and will continue to work with Officers and this Committee to ensure as an Authority, we always look to improve our processes and internal controls.

3.4 All except one audit (Performance Development Reviews) received Substantial Assurance. The internal audits carried out are listed below:

- Fleet Management
- Firefighter pension Administration – West Yorkshire Pension Fund
- Review of Payroll Provider – Dataplan
- Governance and Risk Management
- Capital Projects – Theale Community Fire Station
- Firefighter Pension Account Government Return

3.5 The Performance Development Review audit was given Reasonable Assurance by RSM. The Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development (HHR&L&D) positively and swiftly responded to the audit opinion given on 7 July 2021, and as part of the 2021/22 Quarter Two Performance Report was able to give the following assurances:

'In addition, RBFRS underwent a PDR audit in Spring 2021, which made recommendations regarding the setting of objectives and the inclusion of two deadlines as part of the PDR process – one for completing the meetings and one for returning the endorsed paperwork.

Interim guidance was issued on setting behavioural and SMART objectives, including relevant examples for station based staff. This was then incorporated into the revised PDR policy.

HR undertakes a monthly PDR completion audit and chases individual managers where PDRs have not been completed. This is escalated to Head of Service where appropriate.

A revised policy was issued in October 2021, which included further information and examples on setting SMART and behavioural objectives and two deadline dates for completion – one for completing the PDR interviews (30 June) and one for returning the endorsed paperwork to HR (31 July). This will ensure that staff are receiving the

¹ Annual internal audit report 2020/21 7 July 2021

completed and endorsed paperwork in a timely fashion, which will enable them to understand and continue to work on their objectives.

In line with the policy revision, the training for managers will be revised, with more emphasis on setting objectives and revised section on the Behavioural Competency Framework.^{1 2}

3.6 In October 2021, the Audit and Governance Committee approved the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts. The delay in signing off the Authority's financial statements was due to issues identified by Deloitte in relation to their audit of the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund.

3.7 In accordance to Audit and Governance Committee Terms of Reference, the Committee approved policies on

- Grievance, Bullying and Harassment
- Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption

3.8 At its meeting in January 2022, the Committee recommended the Draft Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members' Code of Conduct for public consultation. Our draft Code largely adopts the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Code of Conduct but was expanded to include the complaints procedure taken from our existing Code of Conduct. The consultation closes on 11 March 2022 and I look forward to receiving the results.

3.9 We have scrutinised the assumptions of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and performance of the Service through Quarterly Performance Reports, and received regular updates on Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP).

3.10 Governance

3.10.1 No formal complaints have been received against Members this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Independent Persons who have been on standby on the event they will be required to investigate complaints along with our Monitoring Officer, Graham Britten. Our Independent Persons, Roger Penfold and David Comben tenure will come to end on 29 June 2022, and the Fire Authority will appoint new Independent Persons at its meeting on 30 June 2022.

3.11 Member Allowances

Member Allowances for the period of June 2021 – Feb 2022 are shown in **Appendix A**. An update on these figures will be made to Fire Authority on 30 June 2021 28

3.12 Member Attendance

The attendance record of Members for the Municipal Year 2021/22, is shown in Appendix B of this report. The Appendix includes all meetings up to the 28

² Quarterly Performance Report Quarter Two 2021-2022 July to September

February 2022. Like Member Allowances, these attendance figures will be updated and reported to the Fire Authority in June 2022.

3.13 In a challenging year, Member attendance has been good with no meetings being inquorate, and all business being able to be conducted. Committee meeting absences have often been due to meeting clashes, and apologies, when received, have generally been in good time.

3.14 Appendix B details Committee meeting attendance only, and does not include Member attendance at Member briefings and events held during the year, for example, Task and Finish Groups, Working Groups, Steering Groups, Fire Liaison Group meetings and Member Development courses.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

4.1 Commitment 5 – We will ensure that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides good value for money.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Member Allowances and expenses (Appendix A) outline the cost to the Fire Authority.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications in this report.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no risk implications in this report.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 None for the purpose of this report.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

10.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the Chief Fire Officer, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Audit and Governance Committee on 19 July 2021, 20 October 2021 and 24 January 2022.

11.2 Members' Scheme of Allowances 2021/22

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – Members' Allowances.

12.2 Appendix B – Members' Attendance.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead 0118 938 4611